

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 14, 2018

Agenda Item: Fishing Regulation Change for Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (R3)

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background:

Montana FWP, The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and other partners have worked collaboratively to develop an adaptive management plan to understand factors that drive the status of Arctic Grayling in Red Rock Creek in the Centennial Valley. In 2013, harvest limits of hybridized Yellowstone Cutthroat trout were liberalized and active trapping and removal by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service occurred to suppress the population to determine the effect that the non-native fish were having on Arctic Grayling. After four years of suppression, it became apparent that the non-native cutthroat hybrids were not the primary driver of Arctic Grayling abundance; therefore, in 2017, FWP changed the harvest regulation to 5 fish of any size, and began to evaluate other factors in the valley that may be influencing the conservation status of Arctic Grayling. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service approached FWP and requested to change the harvest regulation for non-native Yellowstone Cutthroat trout to catch-and-release and use of artificial lures only.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service also requested that the angling season for the adjacent Elk Springs Creek be changed to be closed to angling from May 15 to June 15 to prevent trampling of grayling eggs and be consistent with Red Rock Creek. They requested that the angling season for Widgeon and Culver ponds be changed to be closed to angling from November 30 to April 15 to minimize conflicts with migrating and pre-nesting swans. Finally, they requested that the regulations be changed to allow use of artificial lures only on each of these waterbodies.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

Public comments were accepted from April 23 through May 23. Ten comments were received: 4 in favor of proposed changes, 4 opposed, and 2 that did not specifically support or oppose changes.

Alternatives and Analysis:

The Commission could choose to retain the current fishing regulations, adopt Central District standard regulations, or adopt the proposed regulations.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

The Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge requested FWP staff present this proposal to the Commission.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission accept the proposal to 1) change the daily and possession limits for Red Rock Creek to include no harvest of cutthroat trout and use of artificial lures only, 2) close Elk Springs Creek to angling from May 15 to June 15 and allow use of artificial lures only, and 3) close Widgeon and Culver Ponds from November 30 to April 15 and allow use of artificial lures only.